



# THE FLU: A Guide For Parents

## FLU INFORMATION

### What is the flu?

The flu (influenza) is an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs caused by influenza viruses. There are many different influenza viruses that are constantly changing. They cause illness, hospital stays and deaths in the United States each year. Influenza viruses are named for their type and subtype. Influenza viruses that commonly make people sick are influenza A H1N1 viruses, influenza A H3N2 viruses and influenza B viruses. Sometimes a new influenza virus emerges and starts spreading among people.

### What is 2009 H1N1 flu?

Last flu season a new influenza A H1N1 virus spread worldwide among people. The new virus was called "2009 H1N1" for the year in which it was discovered and its subtype. (This virus was sometimes called "swine flu" or "novel flu".) This flu season, scientists expect both the 2009 H1N1 flu virus along with other seasonal influenza viruses to spread and cause illness.

### How serious is the flu?

Flu illness can vary from mild to severe. While the flu can be serious even in people who are otherwise healthy, it can be especially dangerous for young children and children of any age who have certain long term health conditions, including asthma (even mild or controlled), neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions, chronic lung disease, heart disease, blood disorders, endocrine disorders (such as diabetes), kidney, liver, and metabolic

disorders, and weakened immune systems due to disease or medication. Children with these conditions and children who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy can have more severe illness from the flu.

### How does flu spread?

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or nose.

### What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of flu can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue and sometimes vomiting and diarrhea. Some people with the flu will not have a fever.

### How long can a sick person spread the flu to others?

People with flu may be able to infect others by shedding virus from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. However, children and people with weakened immune systems can shed virus for longer, and might be still contagious past 5 to 7 days of being sick, especially if they still have symptoms.

## PROTECT YOUR CHILD

### How can I protect my child against flu?

To protect against the flu, the first and most important thing you can do is to get a flu vaccine for yourself and your child. Vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months and older. While everyone should get a flu vaccine each flu season, it's especially important that young children and children with long term health conditions get vaccinated. (See list of conditions under "How Serious is Flu?") Also, caregivers of children with health conditions or children younger than 6 months old should get vaccinated. (Babies younger than 6 months are too young to be vaccinated themselves.) Another way to protect babies is to vaccinate pregnant women because research shows that this gives some protection to the baby both while the woman is pregnant and for a few months after the baby is born. A new flu vaccine is made each year to protect against the three flu viruses that research indicates are most likely to cause illness during the next flu season. This season's vaccine protects against the H1N1 virus that caused so much illness last season, an influenza A H3N2 virus, and an influenza B virus. This season's flu vaccine is being made using the same safety and production methods and in the same dose as past flu vaccines. Over the years, millions of flu vaccines have been given in the United States. Flu vaccines have a very good safety record.

### Is there medicine to treat the flu?

Antiviral drugs can treat flu illness. They can make people feel better and get better sooner and may prevent serious



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